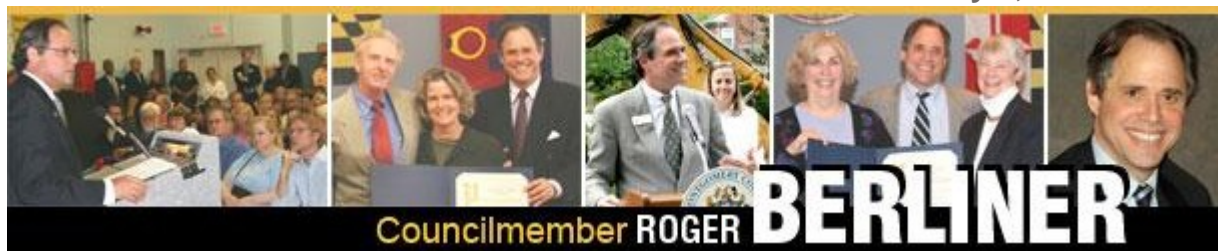


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July 8, 2010



## *The Berliner Brief*

**Dear District 1 Residents and Friends,**

I hope that you had a wonderful and safe 4th of July weekend. Mine was filled with parades and picnics -- our community at its best. There are a few things going on in our county that I wanted to share with you. Hope you are finding ways to stay cool this summer.

Sincerely,

Roger Berliner  
Councilmember, District 1

### **Fiscal Responsibility Rewarded: County Retains Triple-A Bond Rating**

Yesterday the County learned that the powerful financial "ratings" agencies, the Wall Street firms that assess the financial health of local governments, had once again concluded that Montgomery County is on the right path. As a result, the County has retained its coveted AAA bond rating,

This result was by no means assured. The county had been put on a "watch list", indicating that we could have been "downgraded" unless the county demonstrated the political will to right our fiscal ship. And we did. Not easily, not without pain and sacrifice, but the bottom line is that we did. We did it by cutting spending by the most in the modern era; we did it by approving a new and larger "reserve" policy that will better protect us should tax revenues fall as dramatically as they did this year (21%); and we did it by adopting a new six year fiscal plan that calls upon us to match recurring revenue with recurring expenses.

We are not out of the woods of course. Next year will be challenging as well. But our county has shown the ratings agencies and hopefully you that we are committed to being fiscally responsible in these difficult economic times.

### **Cabin John Middle School**

If you live near Cabin John Middle School in Potomac, you have probably heard about the



now-infamous retaining wall that took the community by surprise. While the surrounding community and the local PTAs continue to be supportive of the school's modernization, many residents were surprised and alarmed when they witnessed a large retaining wall being constructed along the perimeter of Gainsborough Road near the intersection of Bells Mill Road. Unfortunately, this retaining wall was not presented to the community via pictures, or otherwise, at any of the community outreach meetings held by MCPS regarding this project. This was a terrible mistake and should not have happened. The school system has acknowledged that there was a failure in communication, and I couldn't agree more.

At my urging, MCPS officials agreed to meet with the Cabin John community. That first meeting, quite frankly, was not terribly successful. As a result, I picked up the phone and conferred directly with Dr. Weast who gave me his [personal commitment](#) to work collaboratively with the neighborhood to alter the design of the wall and mitigate its impact on the surrounding area. Together, community leaders and MCPS staff created a menu of five design options for the retaining wall and in the end, option four, which calls for a two-tiered wall, was selected by a nearly unanimous vote.

While in this case, an acceptable solution was found in the end, I regret that the community had to be put in the situation it found itself. Had the community been informed of the plans for the retaining wall in advance, much angst could have been avoided, but this was not the case and it highlighted a gap in our process - MCPS's internal process and the County's planning process. As a result, I have proposed an additional step in the Mandatory Referral Process required of all governmental agencies.

I believe that when there is a substantial change to an original site plan/design already approved by the Planning Board, the community and Planning Board should be notified. Currently, the County's Mandatory Referral Process does not require this step which is why I have asked the Planning Board to consider adding language to the guidelines that would require an amendment to be filed when a substantial change in design is made. This step would provide greater transparency and trigger the notification process so that communities would not be caught off guard in the future.

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## **An Update on the Organizational Reform Commission**

The County Council, the County Executive, and the public all agree that more can be done to streamline government services and operate more efficiently. Yet progress has been slow, in part because of the stalemate that occurs among the stakeholders --- who wants to lose their job? That is why, working with the County Executive, we jointly proposed a Commission that would focus on reorganizing county government. And the Council agreed.

The Commission's specific charge is to focus on improvements where we would get the greatest bang for our buck taking into account the impact on the quality of service delivery, and to report to the Council prior to the time of next year's budget deliberations. The Commission's recommendations will be voted upon, not sit on some shelf.

Now we are in the final stages of picking our 8 member Commission, 4 picked by the Council and 4 by the County Executive. The Council President, the Chair of the Management and Fiscal Policy Committee, Councilmember Trachtenberg, and myself conducted the interviews. And, as is so often the case, we were impressed with the talents of the people who applied .... quite a few of whom are from District 1. We expect to finalize the membership on the Commission next week and then it is off to work for them.

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## **WSSC Water Restrictions**

Although it was an inconvenience, I think we can all agree that the water restrictions in place over the Fourth of July holiday were a vast improvement over broken water mains. The WSSC has been installing a sophisticated monitoring technology called Acoustic Fiber Optics (AFO) in many of our water mains and

in this 96-inch Pre-stressed Concrete Cylinder Pipe (PCCP) three years ago during a routine inspection. Wires are embedded inside the PCCP and covered by a layer of concrete. When corrosion causes the concrete, and then the wires, to deteriorate, the wires snap and make a "ping" sound. This technology works by "listening" for those sounds. An alarm was sounded Thursday, June 30 after eight pings were detected over a 24-hour period. That set off a series of events which led to WSSC taking the pipe out of service and ordering the Mandatory Water Restrictions.

The water restrictions were necessary in order to maintain pressure for fighting fires and to reduce risk to the entire system. In addition, it was necessary to reduce water usage to take the pressure off of another, smaller transmission pipe. All is back in working order now and we can rest assured that this advance warning system is working as it should. Additional pipes will be equipped with the monitoring devices as routine maintenance is done.

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### Non-Profits Achieving Energy Savings



During the budget discussions earlier this year, I suggested to the Arts and Humanities Council that they investigate ways to help reduce energy costs as a way to reduce the increasing strain on non-profits budgets. Nonprofit Montgomery, the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County and Greater Washington Interfaith Power & Light grabbed the opportunity and, with the help of Council staff and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, put together the first ever NONPROFIT ENERGY ALLIANCE to assist non-profit organizations in Montgomery County and its neighboring jurisdictions organize, and negotiate as a group, for cheaper and greener electricity.

The initial twelve participants of the Nonprofit Energy Alliance include: Mental Health Association of Montgomery County; Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington; Housing Unlimited; Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless; the Nonprofit Village; Manna Food Center; Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring; Montgomery Hospice; Guide Program; Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church; Montgomery Preservation; National Capital Trolley Museum, and Montgomery Housing Partnership.

Through this leadership, non-profits throughout our community have purchased energy from clean, green sources, thus helping Montgomery County meet its climate protection goals, bolster our green economy and save non-profits money that can be redirected to their missions. I am told that through their purchase, the twelve non-profits have saved nearly \$140,000 dollars, and will prevent 1,200 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions - the equivalent to removing 250 cars from our roadway

I want to also recognize the role played by Clean Currents, an independent wholesaler of green energy that provides residents & businesses with affordable, renewable, wind electricity.

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### BRAC Rolls Toward a 2011 Opening

July will be a very busy month for everyone working to prepare for the 2011 opening of the expanded National Navy Medical Center. County, State, Federal officials and citizens are all trying to anticipate and mitigate the transportation impacts to pedestrian, bicyclists and commuters of all kinds. Plans for improvements to sidewalks, bikeways and roads are being considered in a host of meetings this month:

- Thursday, July 15, 2010 (rescheduled from July 1, 2010): Montgomery County Planning Board Mandatory Referral public hearings on the proposed shared use path along Jones Bridge Road between Rockville Pike and Connecticut Avenue, a part of the [Montgomery County Dept. of Transportation Pedestrian/Bike paths project relating to BRAC](#). Time TBA. Montgomery County Planning Department auditorium, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring MD.

- Tuesday, July 20, 2010: Montgomery County Dept. of Transportation Public Workshop on [The MD 355](#)

[Crossing Project between NNMC and the Medical Center Metro station](#). 7:00 pm at the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School Cafeteria.

- Tuesday, July 20, 2010: Meeting of Montgomery County's BRAC Implementation Committee. The BIC will convene informally in the cafeteria of Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School after the BIC members have reviewed the materials at the MCDOT Public Workshop on the MD 355 Crossing Project. Click [here](#) for the agenda, directions and more info on the Community Involvement Page.

- Thursday, July 22, 2010: Montgomery County Planning Board Mandatory Referral public hearings on the SHA Bethesda BRAC Intersections Improvement project. Time TBA. Montgomery County Planning Department auditorium, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring MD.

- Thursday, July 29, 2010: Montgomery County Planning Board Roundtable on the [MD 355 Crossing Project between NNMC and the Medical Center Metro station](#). Time TBA. Montgomery County Planning Department auditorium, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring MD.

The County maintains a very detailed web site that can be accessed here:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/brctmpl.asp?url=/Content/EXEC/BRAC/index.asp>.

In addition, the traffic study for the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood that I requested from the County's Department of Transportation should be available shortly. I remain committed to insuring that any of these proposed changes ultimately have a positive impact on our neighborhoods.

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### My Office

As always, my staff and I look forward to hearing from you and to seeing you at community events.

**Cindy Gibson** is my Chief of Staff and handles land use; **Susan Buffone** focuses on transportation and environmental issues; **Lou D'Ovidio** follows Public Safety and Management and Fiscal Policy Committee issues; **Chad Bolt** focuses on Health & Human Services Committee and Education Committee issues; and **Beth Sylvester** handles constituent service, manages my busy calendar, and is the friendly voice on the other end of the phone when you call our office. All of them will try to facilitate your interaction with County government in any way that they can.

Thank you for your trust, and please let me know what I can do for you. It is truly a privilege to do this work, and I thank you for the opportunity.

Roger Berliner  
Councilmember  
District 1



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